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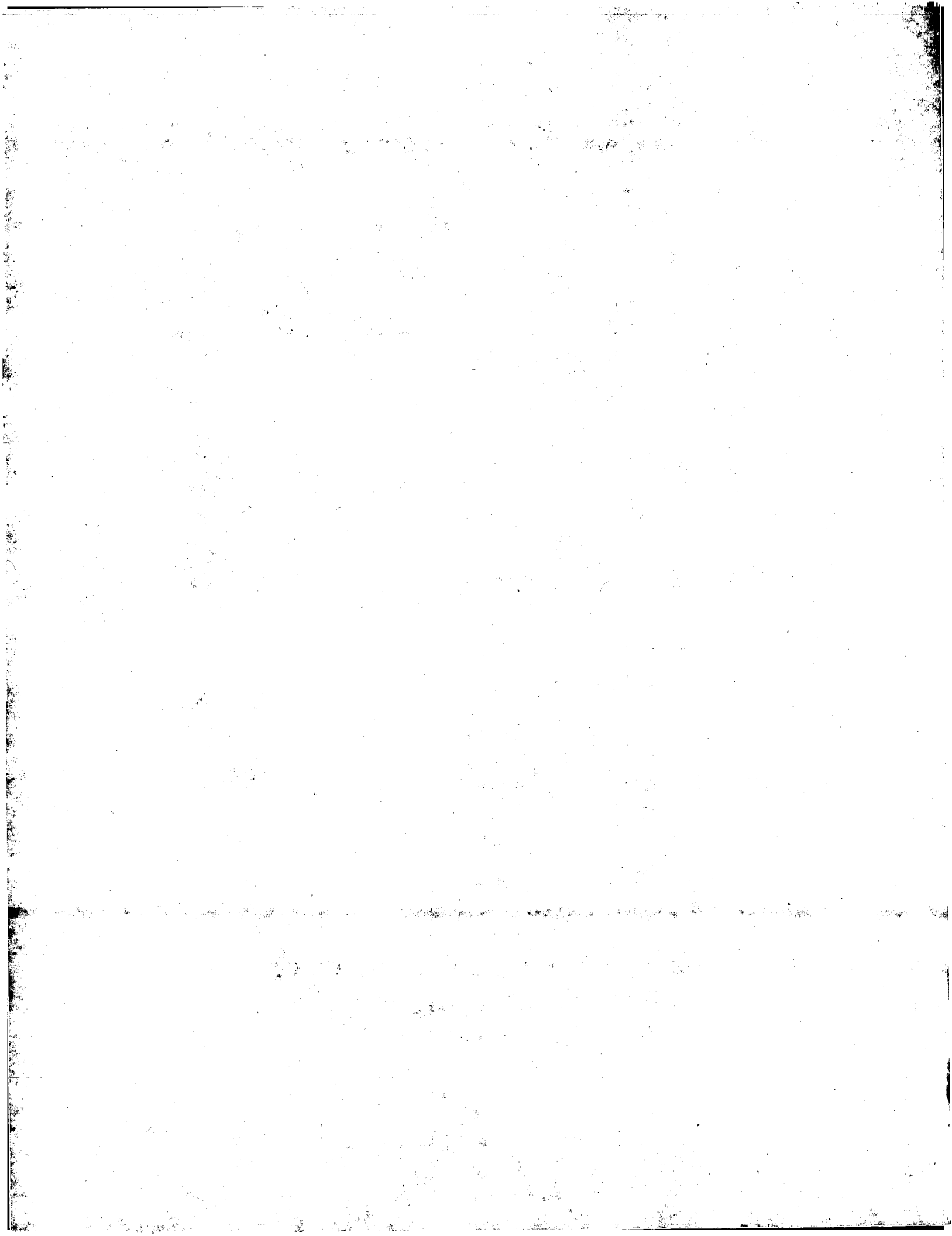
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10612286
01-07-04



(11) **EP 0 765 761 A1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
02.04.1997 Bulletin 1997/14

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: **B41J 25/34, B41J 25/316**

(21) Application number: **96115398.8**

(22) Date of filing: **25.09.1996**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
DE FR GB SE

(30) Priority: **29.09.1995 JP 253339/95**

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(54) **Thermal printing apparatus**

(57) A thermal printing apparatus has a housing (11) divided into two sections, a main shell (1) and a cover (2) which are joined at one end to each other for opening and closing, for ease of the mounting, dismounting, and positioning of a thermal head (26) with a pair of connectors (34, 50) without the use of any conventional tool. A platen (10) is pivotably mounted to the cover (2). The thermal head (26) includes a head side connector (34) and a heating element (30) mounted on one side of a rectangular base (28) thereof for printing on labels (4a). A head frame (40) is provided having positioning members (42) for determining the position of the thermal head (26) to the platen (10) when the housing (11) is closed and positioning projections (46a, 46b, and 46c) for coming into direct contact with four sides of the base (28) to hold the thermal head (26) in its position, and mounted to a base frame (3) in the main shell (1). The other circuit side connector (50) is movably mounted to the head frame (40) for fine positional adjustment to the head side connector (34).

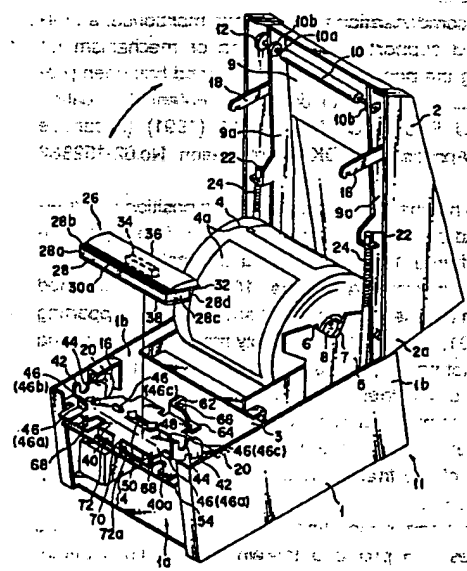


FIG. 1

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Descripti n

The present invention generally relates to a thermal printing apparatus and more particularly, to a thermal printing apparatus of a type, such as a label printer for printing desired sets of characters with a thermal head on a succession of labels attached at intervals of a given distance on a label base sheet, having a thermal head supporting construction.

Such a label printer among thermal printing apparatuses with thermal head is well known in which various information including product name, lot number, barcode, destination, and dispatcher are printed on a succession of blank labels bonded and aligned at intervals of a given distance on a label base tape.

The label printer includes a thermal head at a printing position disposed with its heating element opposite to and in pressure contact with a platen. While the label tape carrying a row of the labels thereon is fed through between the thermal head and the platen, desired sets of characters are thermally printed on the labels by the action of the heating element of the thermal head.

It is essential for the label printer of the type to locate the thermal head and the platen at the relative positions with accuracy. If the positional relationship between the thermal head and the platen is not favorable, the printed characters on the labels may appear less legible.

For compensation for the above mentioned, a thermal head supporting construction or mechanism for adjusting the position of a thermal head has been proposed as disclosed in Japanese Patent Application KOKOKU Publication No.3-35111 (1991) (Japanese Patent Application KOKAI Publication No.62-152882 (1987)).

The mechanism for adjusting the position of a thermal head comprises, as shown in FIG. 6, a head supporting frame 101 supporting a thermal head 100, a movable intermediate plate 102 movably provided between the thermal head 100 and the head supporting frame 101, a platen 103 pivotably mounted to a housing frame, not shown, and aligned directly with the printing position of the thermal head 100, and a thermal head positioning member 104 mounted integral with the movable intermediate plate 102 for adjusting the printing position of the thermal head 100 to directly align with the platen 103.

The head supporting frame 101 has two thread apertures 105 provided therein at both ends depthwisely of the plane of FIG. 6, and is pivotably supported at one end by a pivot 106 for opening upwardly of the unshown housing in the direction denoted by the arrow in FIG. 6 and remains urged at the other end by a resilient member 107 such as a spring.

The movable intermediate plate 102 between the thermal head 100 and the head supporting frame 101 is adapted for movement in parallel to and along the lower surface 101a of the head supporting frame 101 and has a slot 108 therein extending along the center line across

the two thread apertures 105.

A flanged support 109 is placed in the slot 108 as tightened by screws 110 screwed into their respective thread apertures 105 of the head supporting frame 101.

The thermal head 100 is tightened by flat-top screws 111 to the lower surface of the movable intermediate plate 102 so that it can move forward and backward together with the movable intermediate plate 102.

The thermal head 100 is connected at its back to a head connector 112 which supplies a control signal for activating the thermal head 100.

The head connector 112 extends upwardly across through openings 113 and 114 provided in the movable intermediate plate 102 and the head supporting frame 101 respectively to out of the back side of the head supporting frame 101.

The head connector 112 is also coupled at the other end to a PC board connector 116 which is connected by a lead line 115 such as a flat cable to a PC board on the unshown housing frame to which the platen 103 is pivotably mounted.

The thermal head positioning member 104 on the movable intermediate plate 102 has two U shaped notches 117 provided in both sides thereof.

The U shaped notches 117 of the thermal head positioning member 104 is engaged with bearings 118 mounted on a platen shaft 103a of the platen 103.

The thermal head position adjusting mechanism is designed in which the printing position of the thermal head 100 is aligned with the center line across the U shaped notches 117 of the thermal head positioning member 104.

In case that the platen 103 is displaced horizontally due to dimensional errors of a component or vibration of a drive source, the thermal head positioning member 104 allows the thermal head 100 to move and align with the normal of the platen 103. More specifically, any displacement caused by vibration or other error is offset by positioning the printing position of the thermal head 100 for alignment with the platen 103.

For removing the thermal head 100 from the head supporting frame 101 in the thermal head position adjusting mechanism, the platen 103 is disengaged from the U shaped notches 117 of the thermal head positioning member 104 after the housing is opened at the thermal head side. Then, when the screw 110 has been loosened and removed, the movable intermediate plate 102 with the thermal head 100 is released from the head supporting frame 101.

The thermal head 100 is pulled out with the head side connector 112 and the printed circuit board side connector 116 thereon and detached from the movable intermediate plate 102 by loosening and removing the flat-top screws 111.

The head side connector 112 and the printed circuit board side connector 116 are disconnected from the thermal head 100.

Mounting the thermal head 100 to the head supporting frame 101 shall follow a reverse of the above

procedure.

It is necessary for the thermal head position adjusting mechanism to ensure a substantial length of the lead line 115 with the two connectors 112 and 116 for allowing the thermal head 100 on the movable intermediate plate 102 to be untightened and withdrawn from the head supporting frame 101 before disconnected from the connectors 112 and 116.

The length of the lead line 115 requires a considerable size of space for installation in the housing and may disturb and give damage to other adjacent components during the mounting and dismounting of the thermal head 100.

It is thus understood that a particular tool may be desired by a common operator for ease of servicing the thermal head position adjusting mechanism of a thermal printing apparatus disclosed in Japanese Patent Application KOKOKU Publication No.3-35111 (1991) (Japanese Patent Application KOKAI Publication No.62-152882 (1987)) as the mounting and dismounting of the thermal head 100 are troublesome with the two connectors 112 and 116 to be connected and disconnected.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a new and improved thermal printing apparatus in which the mounting and dismounting of a thermal head are facilitated with relevant connectors to be connected and disconnected.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a thermal printing apparatus comprising: a main shell; a frame arranged movable in upper and lower directions for opening and closing the main shell; a thermal head for printing on a printing medium, the thermal head including: (a) a heat radiator plate; (b) a printed circuit board mounted on an upper surface of the head radiator plate; (c) a heating element mounted on an upper surface of the printed circuit board and located on a location having a predetermined positioning relationship to the heat radiator plate; and (d) a first connector provided on the printed circuit board with vertical connecting directions; a platen pivotably mounted to the frame for nipping the printing medium between the platen and the thermal head; first positioning means provided on the frame coaxially of the platen; a thermal head mount having second positioning means for laterally positioning the heat radiator plate and third positioning means arranged laterally movable to the main shell for fixing a horizontal position of the thermal head while engaging with the first positioning means when the frame is lowered to close the main shell, thereby detachably supporting the thermal head; and a second connector mounted on the thermal head mount for detachably connecting to the first connector with the vertical connecting directions while the thermal head being installed on the thermal head mount.

This invention can be more fully understood from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the entire construction of a label printer showing an embodiment of a thermal printing apparatus of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged plan view showing a head frame region of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a partially enlarged cross sectional view with a cover opened and a thermal head removed;

FIG. 4 is a partially enlarged cross sectional view with the cover closed;

FIGS. 5A, 5B, and 5C are views showing the thermal head of FIG. 1, a head connector, and a circuit connector respectively shown in FIGS. 3 and 4; and

FIG. 6 is a partially broken cross sectional view showing a part of a conventional thermal head supporting mechanism.

Reference will now be made in detail to the presently preferred embodiments of the invention as illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate like or corresponding parts throughout the several drawings.

For achievement of the foregoing object of the present invention, a thermal printing apparatus is provided, as shown in FIG. 1, comprising a housing 11 including two, first and second, shells 1 and 2 joined at one end to each other, a platen 10 pivotably mounted on the second shell 2, a thermal head 26 having a heating element 30a disposed on one side of a rectangular base 28 for printing on a printing medium 4a and a head side connector 34 detachably joined a right angle to a plane of the heating element 30a, positioning members 42 for positioning in relation to the platen 10 in the closed state of the housing 11, a thermal head mount 40 having projections 46a, 46b, and 46c which come into direct contact with four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of the base 28 for positioning the thermal head 26 and movably mounted to the first shell 1, and a circuit side connector 50 mounted on the thermal head mount 40 for fine displacement.

The thermal printing apparatus of the present invention also includes a magnetic member 38 mounted opposite to the heating element 30a on the base 28 for attaching the base 28 to the first shell denoted by the reference numeral 1.

The thermal head mount 40 is mounted at a center of one end by a shaft to the first shell 1 and is urged at both sides of the other end by urging means 68 so that the heating element 30a is pressed against the platen 10. Disposed between the thermal head mount 40 and the first shell 1 are two stoppers 70 and 72 for restricting the movement of the thermal head mount 40 urged by the urging means 68 towards the platen 10.

The thermal head 26 is located on the thermal head mount 40 with its projections 46a, 46b, and 46c aligned with the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of the base 28 while the housing 11 is being opened.

As the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of the base 28 are in direct contact with the projections 46a, 46b, and 46c, the magnetic member 38 of the thermal head 26 attracts the surface of the thermal head mount 40 so

that the thermal head 26 is positioned without any displacement in left, right, front, and rear directions on the thermal head mount 40.

While the thermal head 26 is located directly on the thermal head mount 40, its head connector 34 is inserted into the circuit side connector 50 for close connection.

When the housing 11 is closed, the platen 10 in the second shell 2 presses against the surface of the heating element 30a of the thermal head 26, and its bearings 10b come into engagement with positioning notches 44 provided in the positioning members 42 of the thermal head mount 40 to determine the positioning of the platen 10 to the thermal head 26.

The heating element 30a of the thermal head 26 is thus pressed against the platen 10 by the urging means 68 on the thermal head mount 40 so that a printing medium such as a label base sheet carrying labels is nipped between the heating element 30a and the platen 10.

For dismounting the thermal head 26 from the thermal head mount 40, the housing 11 is opened to release the platen 10 from the positioning members 42 and the thermal head 26 is removed from its mount 40.

In other words, the attachment of the base 28 to the thermal head mount 40 by the action of the magnetic member 38 is released.

As the thermal head 26 is removed, the head connector 34 is disconnected from the circuit side connector 50.

At the time, the thermal head mount 40 kept urged by the urging means 68 towards the platen 10 is prevented from further lifting by the stoppers 70 and 72 interposed between the thermal head mount 40 and the first shell 1.

The embodiment of the present invention will be described in more details. Referring to FIG. 1, the thermal printing apparatus is disclosed in the form of a label printer with a thermal head including the housing 11 of two shells; an upper one or cover (the second shell 2) is openably joined to a lower one or housing body (the first shell 1) of a box shape.

The housing body 1 has an opening 1a provided in both upper and front sides thereof. A base frame 3 of a sheet extends horizontally across the opening 1a.

Two supports 5 (shown one in FIG. 1) are mounted in the rear of and on both sides of the base frame 3 for supporting a roll of label base tape 4 on which printing mediums or labels 4a are attached in a row.

The support 5 has a notch 6 of trapezoid shape provided in a top center thereof.

A shaft support extension 7 is provided integral with the support 5 beside the notch 6 extending inwardly at a right angle from the support 5.

The shaft support extensions 7 support in a combination the lower half of a supply shaft 8 extending across the center of the roll of the label tape 4.

There is a cover frame 9 of a channel shape fixedly mounted to the inner surface of the cover 2 and having

two side arms 9a for clearing a lower region of the roll of the label tape 4.

The cover 2 is operable on the housing body 1 with its proximal end 2a pivotably joined by the side arms 9a of the cover frame 9 to the supports 5 so that it can move in two directions denoted by the arrow in FIG. 1 for opening and closing the opening 1a of the housing body 1.

The platen 10 of a roller is mounted by a shaft 10a to the distal ends of the side arms 9a of the cover frame 9.

The shaft 10a of the platen 10 is fixedly joined at one end to a drive gear 12 located outside one of the side arms 9a of the cover frame 9.

The drive gear 12 when the cover 2 is closed comes in mesh with a transmission gear 16 linked to the drive shaft of a motor 14 in the housing body 1.

The platen 10 is rotated by a driving force of the motor 14 transmitted through the transmission gear 16 and the drive gear 12.

An open/closing lever 18 of a channel shape is mounted to each of the side arms 9a of the cover frame 9 so that it can be turned by an operating bar, not shown, provided on the outer surface of the cover 2.

When the cover 9 is closed, the open/closing levers 18 come into engagement with notches 20 provided on both sides of the base frame 3 in the housing body 1.

Upon the unshown operating bar being turned for shifting the cover 2 from its closing state to opening state, the open/closing levers 18 are disengaged from their respective notches 20.

Two support arms 22 are provided between the side arms 9a of the cover frame 9 and side walls 1b of the housing body 1 for holding the cover 2 to the housing body 1.

The support arm 22 has an urging means 24 such as a coil spring fitted therein for urging the cover 2 in its open direction.

The rectangular base 28 of the thermal head 26 for printing on the labels 4a of the label tape 4 has the four sides 20a, 28b, 28c, and 28d assigned to be reference faces for correct positioning.

As best shown in FIG. 5A, the heating element 30a of a belt shape for printing on the labels 4a as the label tape 4 being advanced is seated on a ceramic substrate 30 which is adhesively arranged next to a circuit board 32 on the base 28. The circuit board 32 includes an IC circuit 32a for activating the heating element 30a.

The base 28 may be made of a metallic material such as aluminum for releasing heat generated by the heating element 30a towards the thermal head mount or head frame 40 which will be described later in more details.

The circuit board 32 extends at one end outward from the rear side 28d of the base 28.

The head side connector 34, shown in FIG. 5B, for supplying a control signal to the thermal head 26 is fixedly mounted to a center region of the lower surface of the outwardly extended portion of the circuit board 32.

Also, a cover member 36 is provided over the circuit board 32 for protecting the upper surface of the circuit board 32.

The magnetic member 38 such as a sheet of magnet is bonded by adhesive to the entire lower surface of the base 28.

The magnetic member 38 holds the thermal head 26 in a given place by magnetic attraction on the head frame 40 which will be described later.

The magnetic member 38 may be bonded to a part but not entire surface of the base 28 or may not be provided.

The head frame 40 is made of a metallic, magnetic material, mounted to the front end of the base frame 3, and arranged movable forward and backward for positioning the thermal head 26.

A central region of the head frame 40 is tilted down at a predetermined angle from front to rear, constituting a mount surface 40a on which the thermal head 26 is mounted.

The positioning members 42 are provided integral with the head frame 40 for determining the front and rear position of the platen 10, extending upward at a right angle from both sides of the head frame 40.

U shaped notches 44 provided in the top of the positioning members 42 are formed perpendicular to the mount surface 40a.

This allows the optimum positioning relationship for printing to the heating element 30a of the thermal head 26 positioned on the head frame 40 and the platen 10 when the bearings 10b of the platen 10 are engaged with the U shaped notches 44 of the positioning members 42.

With its bearings 10b engaged with their respective U shaped notches 44, the platen 10 is positioned on the head frame 40 as restrained in both the front and rear directions.

As shown in FIG. 2, the projections 46 formed integrally with the head frame 40 are arranged for holding the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of the base 28 of the thermal head 26 at six different locations.

More particularly, the projection 46a is provided for positioning the front side 28a of the base 28 and formed by bending a tab portion at each end of the head frame 40, two at both ends, at a right angle thus to stand upright on the mount surface 40a.

Similarly, the projections 46b and 46c provided for positioning the two sides 28b and 28c and rear side 28d of the base 28 are formed by bending tab portions, two for each defined by channel shaped cutouts, of the head frame 40 at a right angle thus to stand upright on the mount surface 40a.

Accordingly, the thermal head 26 is precisely positioned on the head frame 40 with the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of its base 28 directly held by the inner surfaces of the projections 46a, 46b, and 46c and restrained in the four, left, right, front, and rear, directions.

As the thermal head 26 is precisely positioned on

the head frame 40 with the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of its base 28 directly held by the projections 46a, 46b, and 46c, the magnetic member 38 on the base 28 tightly holds the head frame 40 by its attraction.

Therefore, the relative positioning relationship between the thermal head 26 and the platen 10 is determined in relation to the base 28, the head frame 40 and the bearings 10b.

The head frame 40 has a rectangular opening 48 in the center thereof.

As shown in FIGS. 3, 5A, and 5C, the circuit side connector 50 is mounted to the back surface of the head frame 40 for connection to the head side connector 34.

The circuit side connector 50 is electrically connected by a lead line 52 such as a cable to a circuit board 54 fixedly mounted on the back side of the base frame 3.

The length and width of the circuit side connector 50 is smaller than the size of the opening 48 of the head frame 40 for insertion in the opening 48 and mounted at both, left and right, ends to a rectangular mounting plate 56 by retaining means 60 such as screws with stepped disk collars 58.

The mounting plate 56 has two mounting apertures 56a provided therein at both, left and right, end.

The stepped collar 58 comprises a radially enlarged region 58a and a radially reduced region 58b formed integrally and coaxially. The diameter A of the radially enlarged region 58a is greater than the width H1 of the opening 48 of the head frame 40, and the diameter B of the radially reduced region 58b is smaller than the diameter C of the mounting aperture 56a in the mounting plate 56.

The circuit side connector 50 when mounted through the opening 48 extends a distance upwardly from the surface of the head frame 40 and is allowed to displace to and from the head frame 40 for fine adjustment.

As the circuit side connector 50 is arranged slightly movable to and from the head frame 40, it can offset intrinsic incorrectness of the connector 34 or 50 and compensate a change in the location of the base 28 which acts as a reference for positioning the thermal head 26 to the head frame 40.

An L shaped support 62 is provided integrally on a rear center region of the head frame 40.

The L shaped support 62 has a horizontally extending slot 63 provided therein.

The L shaped support 62 is movably joined by a retaining means 66, such as a screw extending crosswisely in the slot 63, to a mounting angle member 64 of an L shape securely mounted on the base frame 3.

The distal end of the head frames 40 are secured at two, left and right, ends by the urging means or coil springs 68 to the base frame 3.

This allows the head frame 40 to turn and move about the support axis 62a of the L shaped support 62 in the four, upper, lower, front, and rear directions in relation to the base frame 3.

The head frame 40 remains urged upwardly by the urging means 68 for turning about the support axis 62a of the support 62.

When the cover 2 is closed, the urging means 68 press the heating element 30a of the thermal head 26 located in position on the head frame 40 against the periphery of the platen 10 nipping the label tape 4 between the heating element 30a and the platen 10.

Hence, the thermal head 26 is urged by a desired pressure against the platen 10.

The stoppers 70 is formed integral with the head frame 40 by bending a center distal portion of the head frame 40 upwardly to a channel shape.

The stopper 70 is engaged in a horizontally extending cutout 72a provided in the opposite stopper 72 of an L shaped angle number fixedly mounted on a distal center region of the base frame 3.

When the cover is opened, the stopper 70 comes into contact with an upper end of the cutout 72a of the angle member 72 thus restricting and preventing the head frame 40 from being lifted by the urging force of the urging means 68.

Prior to starting the printing on the labels 4a, the thermal head 26 is positioned on the head frame 40.

More specifically, the thermal head 26 is lowered from above to the mount surface 40a of the head frame 40 so that the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of its base 28 come into direct contact with the inner walls of the corresponding projections 46a, 46b, and 46c of the head frame 40.

Simultaneously, the magnetic member 38 bonded to the lower surface of the base 28 holds the head frame 40 by its attraction.

As the result, the thermal head 26 is securely positioned on the head frame 40 with the four sides 28a, 28b, 28c, and 28d of the base 28 closely engaged with the inner walls of the corresponding projections 46a, 46b, and 46c of the head frame 40, thus allowing no displacement in any of the left, right, front, and rear directions.

As the base 28 is located in relation to the head frame 40, its head side connector 34 is fitted into and surrounded by the circuit side connector 50.

Because the circuit connector 50 is mounted movable on the head frame 40 at more or less of freedom in the left, right, front, and rear directions, its connection to the head side connector 34 is guaranteed.

After the thermal head 26 is positioned to the head frame 40, the label tape 4 of the roll is loaded with its shaft 8 placed on the shaft support extensions 7 of the supports 5.

The leading end of the label tape 4 is fed out to the front end of the housing body 1 so that the labels 4a on the label tape 4 pass across the width of the heating element 30a, and then the cover 2 is closed.

The cover 2 is secured with its open/closing levers 18 engaged with the notches 20 of the housing body 1.

While the heating element 30a of the thermal head 26 is engaged with the platen 10 of which the bearings

10b are held in the notches 44 of the head frame 40, it is securely positioned under an appropriate pressure given by the urging means 68 with the label tape 4 interposed between the heating element 30a and the platen 10.

Upon activating the printing apparatus, the label tape 4 is advanced between the thermal head 26 and the platen 10 towards the front end of the housing body 1 and the printing of characters is made on its labels 4a.

When the thermal head 26 in the housing body 1 needs to be replaced with a new one after a considerable length of operating time for printing on a large number of the labels 4a, the cover 2 is opened by disengaging the open/closing levers 18 from the their respective notches 20 in the housing body 1 with the unshown operating bar.

Then, the thermal head 26 is upwardly pulled out and removed from the head frame 40.

As the thermal head 26 is lifted upward, the head side connector 34 departs from the circuit side connector 50.

A new thermal head 26 is then positioned and tightened in the prescribed manner.

As set forth above, the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention includes the positioning projections 46 (46a, 46b, and 46c) provided on the mount surface 40a of the head frame 40, which is installed to the base frame 3 in the housing body 1, for holding at left, right, front, and rear locations the base 28 of the thermal head 26, the positioning members 42 provided on both ends of the head frame 40 for locating the platen 10 when the cover 2 is closed, and the circuit side connector 50 movably mounted across the mount surface 40a for connecting to the head side connector 34 of the thermal head 26 with a proper positional adjustment. Accordingly, the thermal head 26 installed with no retaining screws can be mounted and dismantled without the use of any conventional tool such as a screwdriver as well as positioned at accuracy.

Also, the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention allows the two connectors 34 and 50 to be connected and disconnected upon mounting and dismounting of the thermal head 26. Accordingly, it is not necessary to draw out the circuit side connector 50 with its lead line 52 from the housing body 1 during the dismounting of the thermal head 26.

This permits the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention to provide ease of the handling of the lead line 52 without saving a considerable size of space for installation of the lead line 52 and with less chance of tangling and giving damage to other components during the mounting and dismounting of the thermal head 26 and thus increase its operating efficiency.

Since the thermal head 26 in the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention is easily mounted and dismantled by hand on the head frame 40 with the two connectors 34 and 50 connected and disconnected respectively at the time, substantial jobs including the inspection and maintenance service of the apparatus

can be performed with much ease.

In the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention, the head frame 40 on which the thermal head 26 is installed is pivotably secured at one end to the base frame 3 in the housing body 1 with its pivot slightly movable for adjustment and remains urged at the other end by the urging means 68. As the head frame 40 is movable at a given degree of freedom in the left, right, front, and rear directions on the base frame 3, the positional relationship between the thermal head 26 and the platen 10 is maintained constantly through aligning the printing position of the thermal head 26 with the normal extending across the thermal head 26 and the platen 10 even if the printing position has been dislocated by vibration during the operation. Also, while the cover 2 is closed, the thermal head 26 remains evenly urged against the platen 10 by the yielding force of the urging means 68 thus performing an accurate printing action.

In the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention, the thermal head 26 is urged against the mount surface 40a of the head frame 40 by the attraction of the magnetic member 38 in addition to the mechanical connection between the two connectors 34 and 50. Accordingly, the attachment of the thermal head 26 to the head frame 40 is enhanced thus preventing the thermal head 26 from removing off from the head frame 40 when the cover 2 is being opened.

Furthermore, the circuit side connector 50 to be coupled to the head side connector 34 of the thermal head 26 is mounted at a degree of freedom to the head frame 40 and can offset any variation of the base 28 which acts as the reference for positioning the thermal head 26 and the two connectors 34 and 50.

The present invention is not limited to the label printer of the above described embodiment but is successfully applicable to any type of the thermal printing apparatus equipped with a thermal head.

Although the embodiment includes the platen 10 mounted in the cover 2 and the head frame 40, on which the thermal head 26 is located, mounted in the housing body 1, a reverse arrangement will be employed with equal success in which the platen 10 and the head frame 40 are changed over.

In the latter case, the head frame 40 is pivotably mounted at one end to the cover frame 9 in the cover 2 for adjustment in the center and at the other end urged by the urging means 68 while the platen is installed in the housing body 1.

The thermal printing apparatus of the present invention allows the thermal head to be positioned and secured without using conventional retaining screws. Accordingly, the mounding, dismounting, and positioning of the thermal head can be carried out with no use of a common tool such as a screwdriver in synchronism with the connection and disconnection of a pair of the connectors. Also, it is unnecessary to draw out the circuit connector with its lead line from the housing body during the mounting and dismounting of the thermal head, whereby no troublesome handling of the lead line

is required and the operating efficiency of the thermal printing apparatus will be increased.

Also, the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention includes the magnetic member of which attraction is used for attaching the thermal head to the thermal head mount in addition to the mechanical connection between the two connectors. Accordingly, the thermal head is securely positioned on the surface of the thermal head mount and will hardly be removed off when the housing is opened.

Furthermore, the thermal printing apparatus of the present invention permits the thermal head mount to be pivotably mounted at one end to the first shell of the housing and at the other end urged by the urging means so that the thermal mount is movable at a certain degree of freedom in any of the left, right, front, and rear directions. Accordingly, if displacement of the thermal head is caused by vibration during the operation, it can be offset by aligning the printing position of the thermal head with the normal extending from the thermal head to the platen. The thermal head is constantly positioned in relation to the platen as evenly urged against the platen, thus ensuring a highly accurate printing action.

Claims

1. A thermal printing apparatus characterized by comprising:

a main shell (1);
a frame (9) arranged movable in upper and lower directions for opening and closing the main shell (1);
a thermal head (26) for printing on a printing medium; and
a platen (10) pivotably mounted to the frame (9) for nipping the printing medium between the platen (10) and the thermal head (26); characterized in that:

the thermal head (26) comprises:
(a) a heat radiator plate (28);
(b) a printed circuit board (32) mounted on an upper surface of the heat radiator plate (28);
(c) a heating element (30) mounted on an upper surface of the printed circuit board (32) and located on a location having a predetermined positioning relationship to the heat radiator plate (28); and
(d) a first connector (34) provided on the printed circuit board (32) with vertical connecting directions;

said apparatus further comprises:

first positioning means (10b) provided on the frame (9) coaxially of the platen (10);
a thermal head mount (40) having second posi-

tioning means for laterally positioning the head radiator plate (28) and third positioning means arranged laterally movable to the main shell for fixing a horizontal position of the thermal head (26) while engaging with the first positioning means (10b) when the frame (9) is lowered to close the main shell (1), thereby detachably supporting the thermal head (26); and

a second connector (50) mounted on the thermal head mount (40) for detachably connecting to the first connector (34) with the vertical connecting directions while the thermal head (26) being installed on the thermal head mount (40).

2. A thermal printing apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that the thermal head (26) further includes a magnetic member (38) mounted to a bottom of the heat radiator plate (28) and used for attaching the thermal head (26) to the thermal head mount (40) by its magnetic attraction.
3. A thermal printing apparatus according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the second connector (50) is movably mounted to the thermal head mount (40) for fine lateral positional adjustment.
4. A thermal printing apparatus according to any of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that the frame (9) is supported by a cover (2) movable for opening and closing the main shell (1).
5. A thermal printing apparatus according to any of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the thermal head mount (40) is pivotably mounted at one end to the main shell (1) for positional adjustment at center and at another end urged on both ends by urging means (69) so that the heating element (30) is pressed against the platen (10), and stoppers (70, 72) are provided between the thermal head mount (40) and the main shell (1) for restricting the movement of the thermal head mount (40) towards the platen (10) caused by a yielding force of the urging means (68) when the frame (9) is opened.
6. A thermal printing apparatus according to any of claims 1 to 5, characterized in that the main shell (1) includes a container mounted therein behind the thermal head mount (40) for accommodating a roll of the printing medium.
7. A thermal printing apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that the printing medium is a roll of base tape (4) on which a plurality of labels (4b) are attached at equal intervals of a predetermined distance.

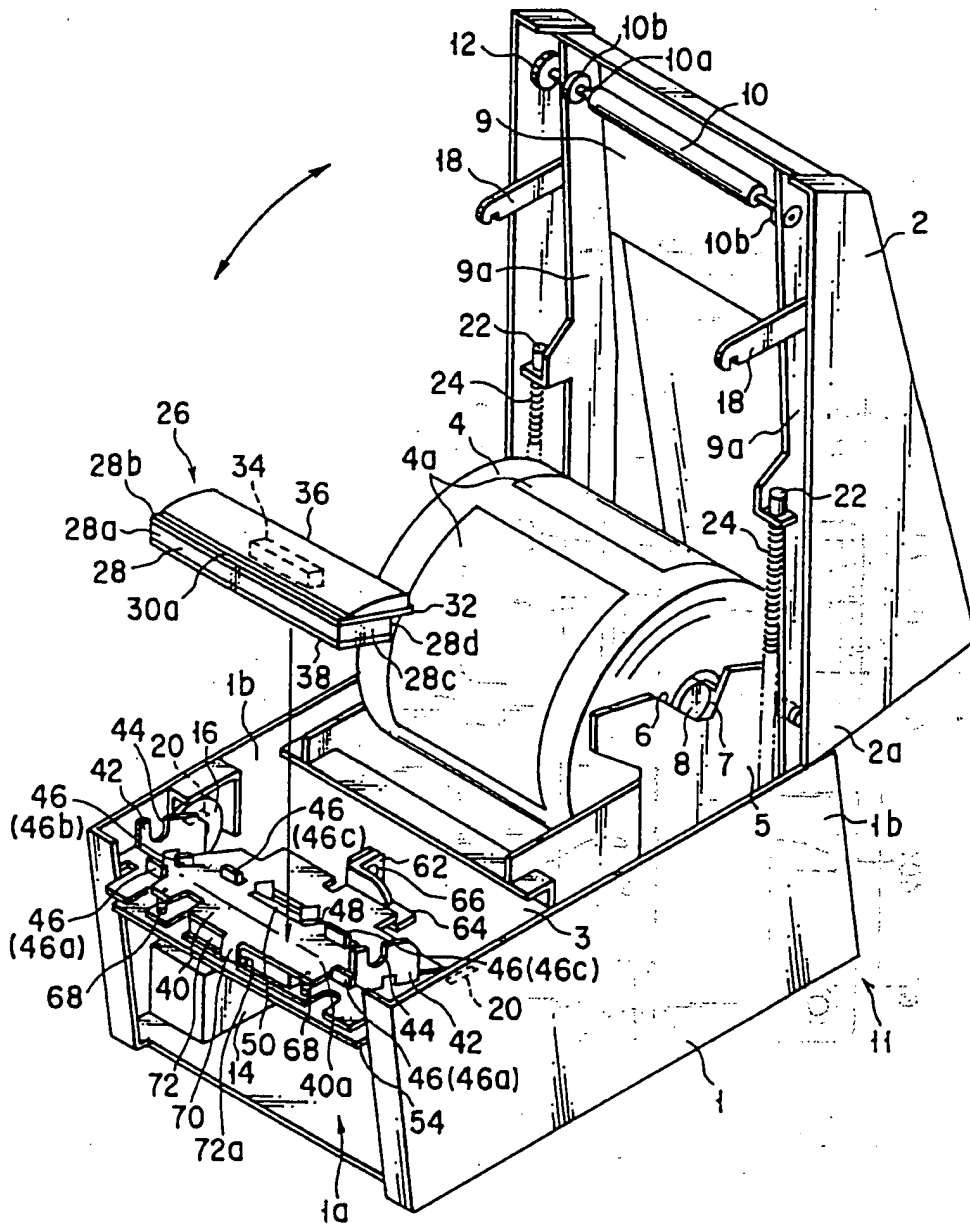


FIG. 1

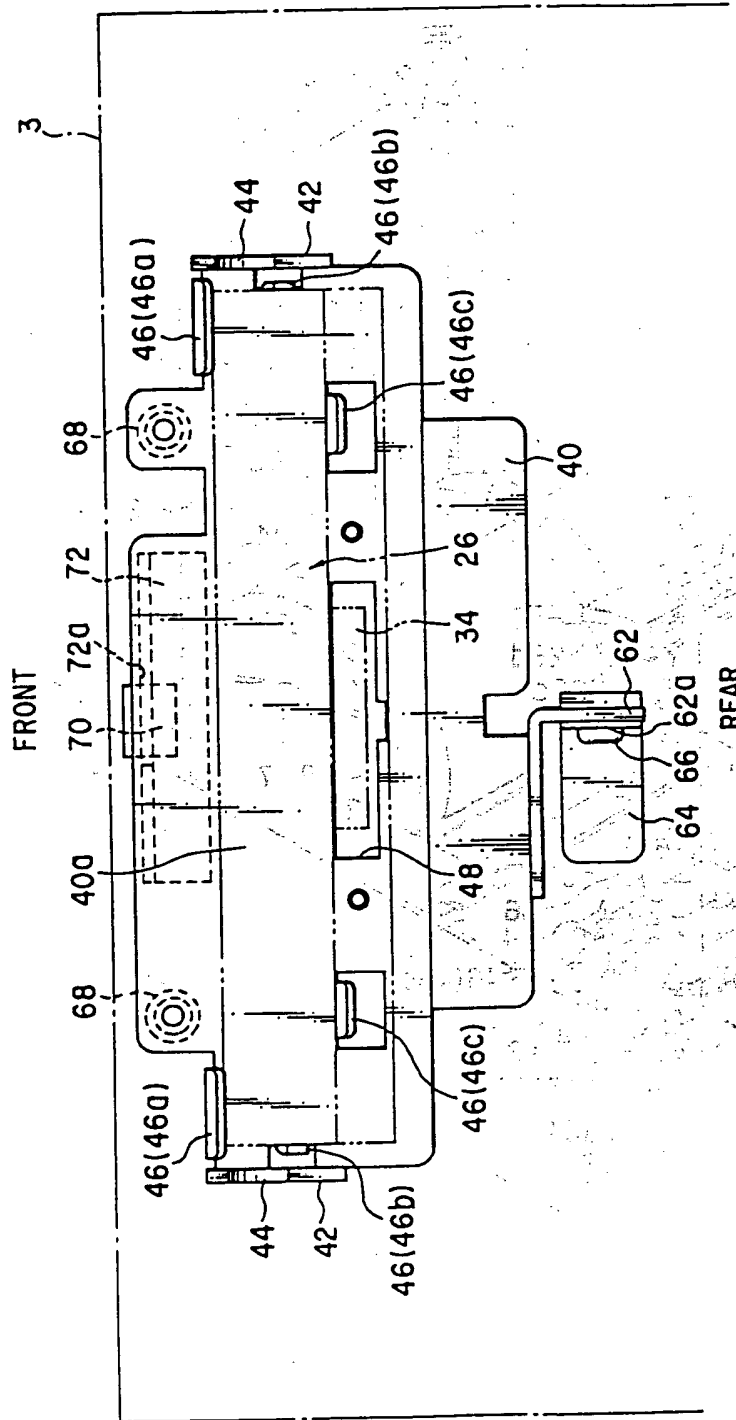
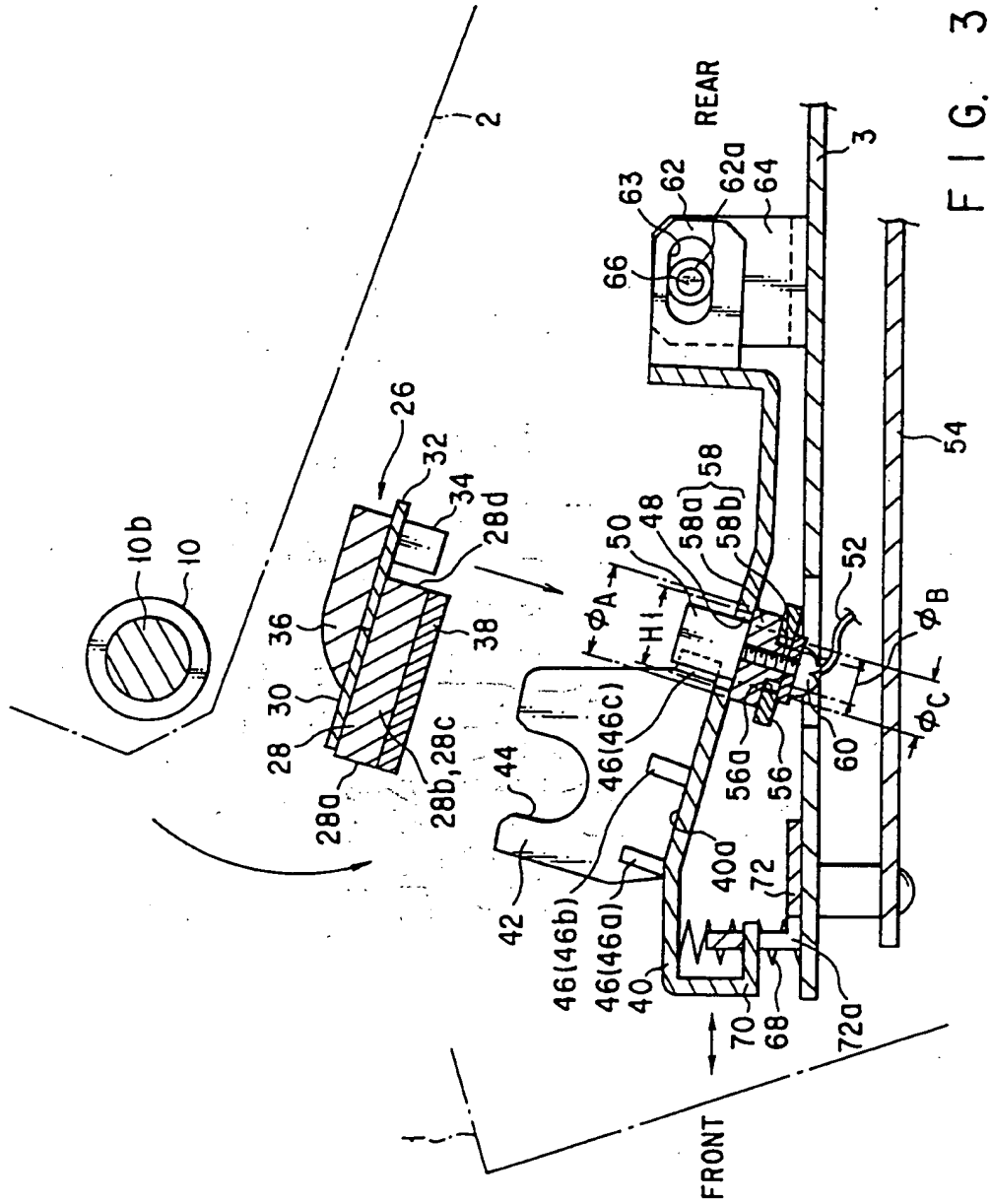


FIG. 2



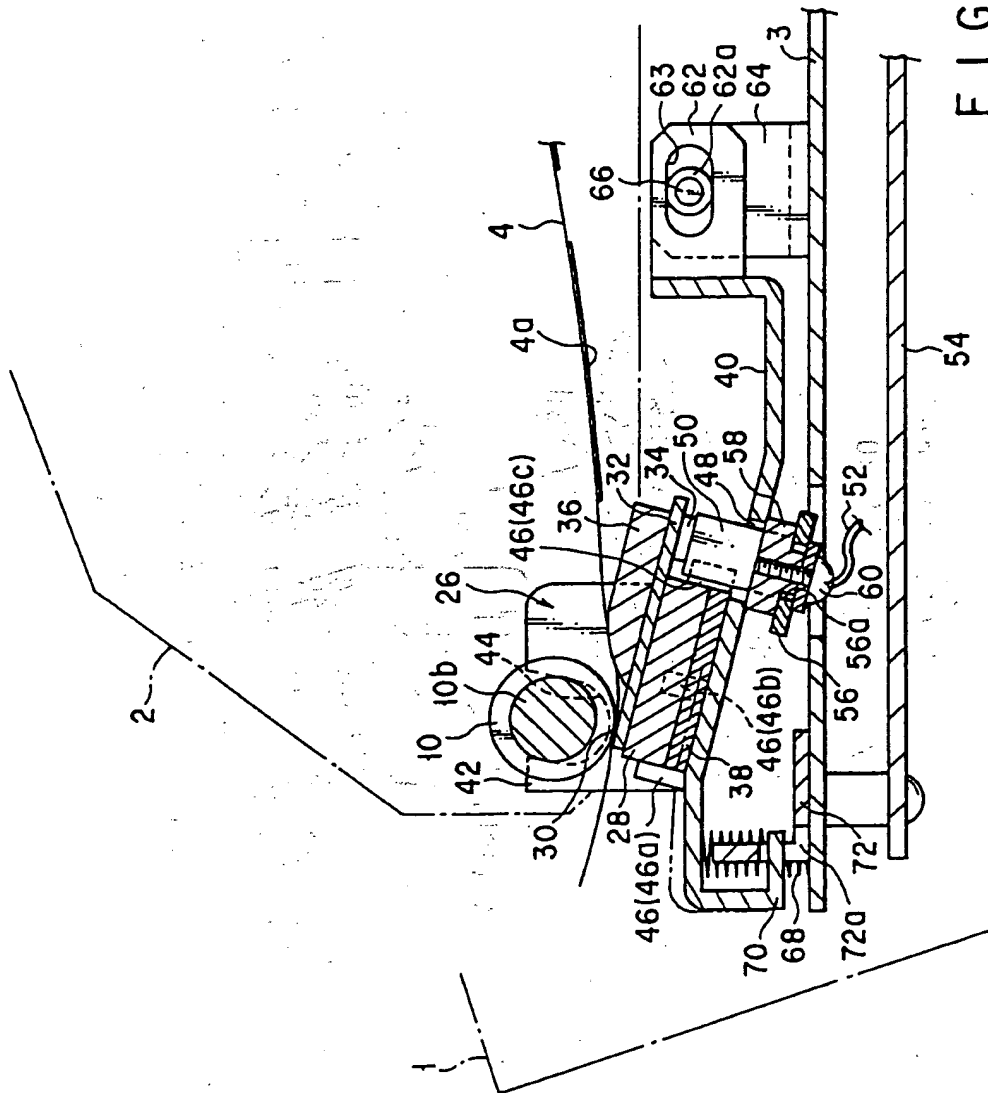


FIG. 4

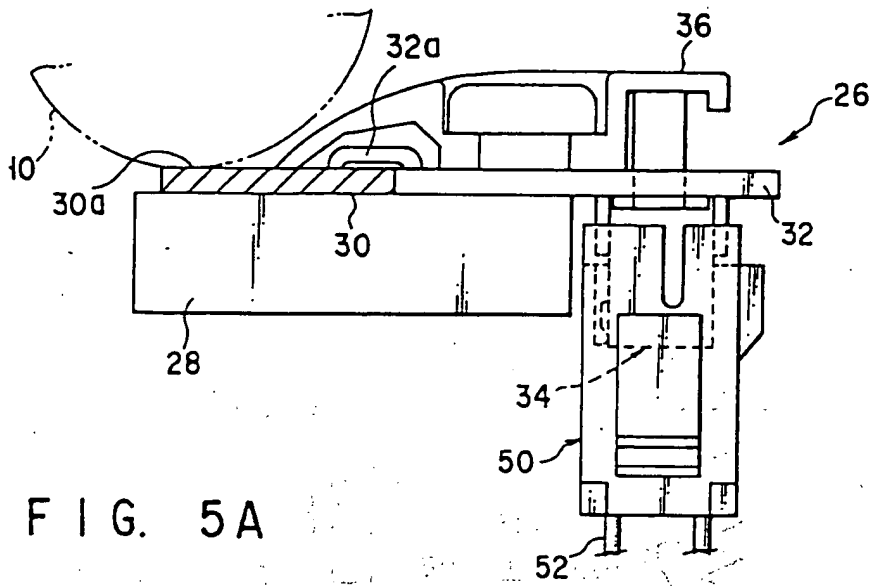


FIG. 5A

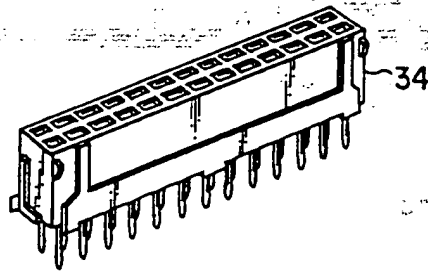


FIG. 5B

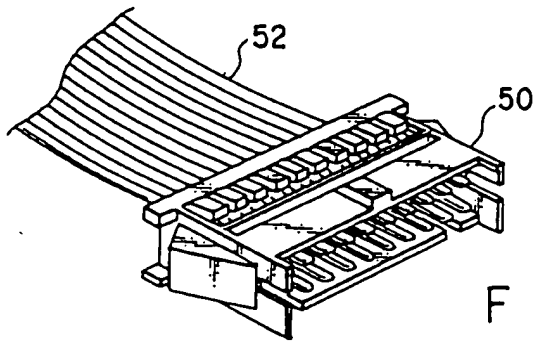


FIG. 5C

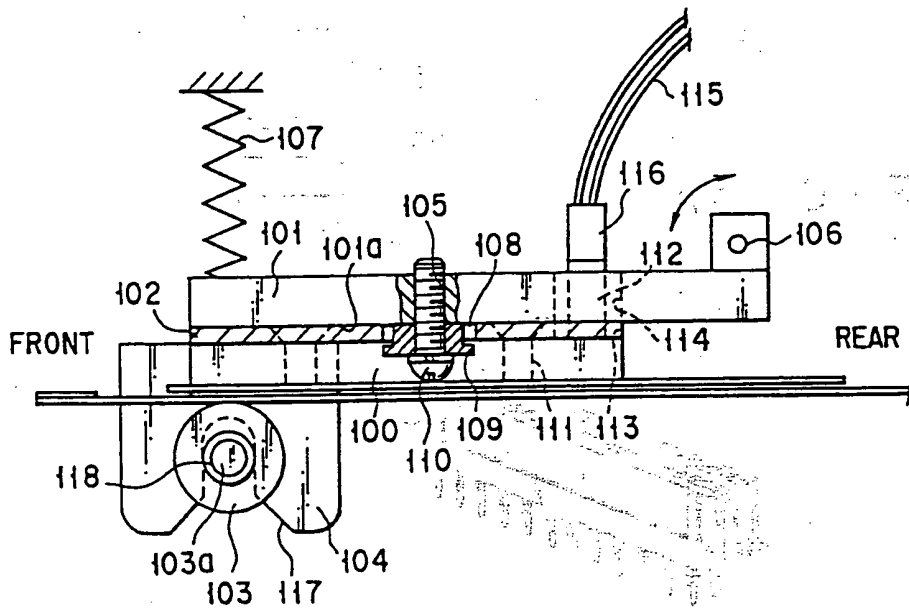


FIG. 6



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 96 11 5398

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 6)
A	US-A-5 248 207 (YAMAMOTO ET AL.) * column 8, line 48 - column 11, line 19; figures 11-16 *	1	B41J25/34 B41J25/316
A	EP-A-0 430 565 (FUJITSU LIMITED) * column 3, line 11 - column 5, line 45; figures 4-7 *	1	
A	FR-A-2 484 916 (ING. C. OLIVETTI & C., SPA) * page 14, line 34 - page 20, line 15; figures 14-19 *	1	
A	EP-A-0 348 176 (SHINKO DENKI KABUSHIKI KAISHA) * column 5, line 9 - column 7, line 42; figures 4-7 *	1	
A	US-A-4 896 166 (BARKER ET AL.) * column 3, line 37 - column 7, line 3; figures 1-5 *	1	
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 14, no. 23 (M-920) [3966] , 17 January 1990 & JP-A-01 263067 (CANON INC.), 19 October 1989, * abstract *	1	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl. 6)
			B41J
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 16 January 1997	Examiner Rivero, C
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